DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 229 836 EA 015 613

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TITLE The W.A. Peer Process Consultancy Project: Action Research as Inset for Principals.
PUB DATE Dec 82
NOTE 24p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the New Zealand Association for Research in Education (Christchurch, New Zealand, December 3-5, 1982). Some pages will be marginally reproducible.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Action Research; Administrator Role; Change Strategies; *Consultation Programs; Educational Improvement; Feedback; Foreign Countries; Group Dynamics; Intervention; *Management Development; *Peer Evaluation; Pilot Projects; *Principals; Secondary Education; Training Methods
IDENTIFIERS *Australia (Western Australia)

ABSTRACT

Five self-selected triads of Western Australia (W.A.) principals served as process consultants to improve their schools. Patterns of communication, leadership procedures, tensions impeding collaboration, decision-making, and problem-solving procedures were the foci of attention. The strategy asked each consultant pair (in turn) to clarify their values with regard to a real administrative issue in their peer's school; to construct a vision of a feasible alternative; and to generate change strategies and tactics before offering feedback and facilitative services. The consultation process occurred over a 2-month period followed by a day-long workshop. Most of the principals found the experience productive, and regretted its termination. Reports from each triad are summarized, and implications drawn later by the author are provided. A table illustrates responses to a survey of competencies and understandings consultants wanted as content for future workshops. (Author/MLF)

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# THE W.A. PEER PROCESS CONSULTANCY PROJECT:

## ACTION RESEARCH AS INSET FOR PRINCIPALS

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ABSTRACT

In this INSET pilot, triads of principals found they could negotiate guidelines and serve each other as process consultants. Most found the experience invigorating, productive, and regretted the termination of the pilot. The strategy asked each consultant pair (in turn) to clarify their values with regard to a real administrative issue in their peer's school. Further they had to construct a vision of a preferred feasible alternative, and to generate change strategies and tactics before offering feedback and facilitative services. The key mechanism appears to be an internal action research process. Difficulties encountered are explicit in this report, and are offered to inform future efforts.

AUTHOR NOTE

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NEW ZEALAND ASSOCIATION FOR RESEARCH IN EDUCATION

1982 CONFERENCE

3-5 DECEMBER

COLLEGE HOUSE, UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY, CHRISTCHURCH

EA 015 613

# THE W.A. PEER PROCESS CONSULTANCY PROJECT: ACTION RESEARCH AS INSET FOR PRINCIPALS.

R.J.S. Macpherson
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## Introduction

How might principals learn best? If we assume that in their own terms they are ideologically professional[1] rather than bureaucratic, and recognize that they are by preparation teachers rather than administrators[2], then the Rand study[3] provides preconditions to the design of principal development strategies. Design would recognize that principals possess important clinical expertise, and that they will learn in an adaptive, heuristic, long-term and non-linear manner. Further, their learning must be tied to school-site development efforts, and it will be critically influenced by organizational factors in the school, and by those in the structures into which the school is embedded.[4]

From the extensive study of professional inservice by Joyce and Showers[5] it can be drawn that principals need to experience four levels of impact: awareness of needs, the acquisition of concepts and organized knowledge, the learning of principles and skills, and finally, their application. They propose training components to foster changes in performance as experiential learning of theory or skill or strategy, practice in simulated and real settings, structured and open-ended feedback on performance, and coaching during application. Common sense perhaps, but common in practice?

A comprehensive overview and critical analysis of organization development in schools[6] found that effective programs exhibited particular characteristics. A whole-school focus, and a systems orientation were found to be features, and participants typically experienced action research and problem solving cycles. The heavy use of group processes, feedback to individuals and experiential learning were widely evident, as was a contingency orientation and the use of skilled external process facilitators.[7] Further, Knefelkamp et al.[8] provide psychosocial and cognitive developmental theories, maturity and typology models, and person-environment interaction interpretations of how adults learn that strongly support the line of argument above.

Recognizing the recent vulnerability of education budgets, and shaky commitment to on-site inservice, designers seeking low-cost strategies need to remain cognizant of the criteria above for effective school and principal development. An account follows of just such a search in Western Australia.

THE DESIGN AND MOUNTING OF THE PROJECT.

In early 1980, the very useful N.S.W. School Development Project data[9] became available, and it was appraised and related to W.A. conditions by the writer.[10] There were at that time, four strategies being used in W.A. to help principals: workshops and consultative services run by some regional superintendents, annual association conferences, a once-only three-day leadership course, and informal peer counselling. Despite the distances involved, the informal network among the high school principals was then transmitting a developing awareness of why their leadership should change, what in schools should change, but that interest was focussing onto the 'how' processes of facilitating change in schools. Also indicated was that as analysis of any school implies the need for feedback on perceptions of performance, 'top-down' or 'grass-roots' agents would be unacceptable. Instead principals would be most responsive to self-selected peers, particularly if procedures enhanced their own performance as educational leaders, and used an approach that developed the whole school as a coherent social enterprise.

The writer proposed a four-year project that accepted these design constraints and lessons explicit in the NSW data. Extensive negotiations involving influential individuals, the Teacher Development Branch, and the W.A. High Schools' Principal Association (WAHSPA) led to an understanding that a one-year pilot could proceed. The pilot was formally legitimated by a brief presentation at the 1980 WAHSPA Conference in terms which emphasised the design features negotiated:

* Be based on self-selected triads of principals; given the need for maximum depth of analysis and the likely intervisitation rates.

* Develop along lines that each triad finds convenient and profitable; each principal to develop further his school as a unit with the help of two peers acting as process consultants.

* Allow principals to increase their experience and skill as school development consultants, and thus in time, extend the range of consultancy services available to schools in Western Australia.

* Be summarized and reviewed at the end of one year, and to possibly yield an effective general model of whole-school development with wider applicability in Western Australian education.

* Be facilitated by the writer (then seconded to the Teacher Development Branch) who will satisfy information and training needs as they develop.

In a letter inviting participation, and at subsequent opportunities, process consultancy was reaffirmed as aiming to improve the procedures used by staff to reach their educational objectives.[11] Patterns of communication, leadership procedures, tensions impeding collaboration, decision-making and problem-solving procedures were defined as the foci of attention.

Twenty-four of the eighty-four W.A. high school principals volunteered to participate, in some instances specifying conditions. Protracted consultations resulted in five, largely self-selected triads being formed. A modified Delphi process over two months, and a day-long workshop produced the following guidelines by late October, 1980. The phases must be seen as cyclic, overlapping, sometimes concurrent; they were used to confirm ways-and-means of operating that were acceptable to all fifteen involved.

STAGE ONE:

ENTRY

* Consultant effectively delegates for his periodic absences from school.
* Consultants clarify client principal's definition of target area for improvement.
* Consultants negotiate and agree visit timings and purposes.
* Client principal explains consultancy to staff, and clarifies the issues to be focussed on, and purposes, and discusses how matters of confidence will be handled.

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STAGE TWO:

DIAGNOSIS

* Consultants collect perceptual data pertinent to target area: they will accept divergent views, clarify meanings, and generate trust and acceptance. Open, relaxed, non-evaluative, tactful enquiries, and observing meetings will be the data collection methods initially used.
* Consultants regularly and discretely exchange information to reinforce their impartiality, and to avoid affective involvement.
* Consultants prepare an impartial overview of the (possibly divergent) perceptions of the issue. They might cite data from open-question surveys, but will depersonalise and generalise the data so that views are untraceable.

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STAGE THREE:

FEEDBACK

* Consultants present the range and content of perceptions of the issue to the whole staff.
* Consultants reflect pertinent information on the issues frankly and amicably.
* Consultants clearly indicate the differences between generalised perceptions, individual opinions, and facts.
* Consultants help staff understand the feedback by clarifying findings, without trying to offer advice.
* Consultants present written feedback, and allow time for thoughtful consideration by all parties before contracting.

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STAGE FOUR:

CONTRACTING

* Consultants help clarify the client Principal's intervention objectives.
* Consultants negotiate objectives and evaluation criteria for change in current procedures with whole staff.
* With staff planning team, consultants design intervention appropriate to the intended outcome.
* Planning team clarify to staff all aspects of the intervention process, and confirm the role of the consultants during this phase as facilitative-only in nature.
* The contract could specify a wide range of interventions, from merely advice-giving to individuals, to jointly-planned whole-school in-service.

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STAGE FIVE:

INTERVENTION

* Whole-staff, or smaller peer professional groups use pre-planned meetings and structured experiences to resolve issues, consultants possibly facilitating.
* Interventions could utilize a Problem-Solving Cycle, i.e.
    1. Problem or Issue Specification: after a close examination of feedback data.
    2. Ideal Situation or Criteria: for Evaluating Successful Change.
    3. Analysis of Changes Required.
    4. Generating of Alternatives, Ways and Means etc.
    5. Selection of Alternatives, Ways and Means.
    6. Action Plans and Contracts.
    7. Formative Evaluation using criteria developed in 2. above.
* Consultants should attempt to plan activities that are non-directive, non-competitive, and experiential for participants. Further, they should focus on practical issues, use a common-sense approach, and be planned to yield professional involvement, commitment and action.
* Consultants free to utilize W.A. Teacher Development Branch expertise on in-service modes and management.
* Consultants maximise opportunities for school leader roles in group work, encouraging ownership of processes, not necessarily content.

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STAGE SIX:

WITHDRAWAL

* Client principal and subordinate leaders manage the emergent change.
* Consultants monitor attitudinal change, allowing considerable time.
* Consultants openly accept changing staff definitions, facilitating reflection by using staffs' criteria-for-success.
* Consultants maintain focus of attention, avoid no-win situation of accepting broader vistas of changing targets for improvement.
* Consultants plan for withdrawal, discourage client dependence by emphasising 'criteria for success,' and abilities of staff.
* Consultants openly terminate one contract, before beginning the process leading to the next.

The postal and workshop process was designed with local conditions in mind, and was intended to generate understanding, ownership and commitment. Subsequent information indicates adherence to the guidelines varied.

Some difficulties were anticipated. The instability of triads as groups, that triads might legitimize negative aspects of principalship, or that triads could be formed for alternative purposes (e.g. flight, band-wagoning) were three concerns. The structuring of consultant coalitions (as the sites and roles changed) was expected to resolve the first issue, but given the early critical need for intra-triad trust, only the fostering of inter-triad communication was used to control activity.

Participants recognized three forms of accountability:

(a) to the client principal and school; and thus the need to use data ethically from both sources,

(b) to other principals seeking to develop schools; and thus the need to systematically log events, and the needs and impact of neophyte process consultants,

(c) to the Department and wider interest groups; and thus the need to monitor costs, summarize efforts and outcomes, and to contribute to an informed overview by a non-participant. (A highly respected acting-superintendent agreed to this role). Reporting proforma were then designed for participants to use after each visit.

Determined to learn by doing, participants immediately contracted to intra-triad familiarization visits, and the writer to conduct literature searches on 'target areas for improvement'. Access was gained to a hitherto closed Departmental computer data base to satisfy accelerated

demand for relevant updated articles, and the writer visited most of the schools to clarify consultant needs. By mid April 1981, reports and visits indicated that most groups were deeply engaged in diagnosis or feedback activity, some at the early contracting-for-intervention phases. A workshop was organized to share information on developments in schools and consultancy, and to define the skills and understandings consultants wanted as content for future training workshops. The reports and responses to instruments provide data crucial to understanding what had happened.

TRIAD REPORTS

At the workshop reports from each triad were accepted, clarified and discussed. The implications were later drawn by the writer, who provided considered feedback to the triads. In many respects the feedback encapsulated peer consultant response to each triad's report.

The First Triad reported that a very generalist approach was used between philosophically dissimilar principals. A wide range of issues was discussed; cultural dimensions of clients, school design, pastoral systems and staffing. Analysis was confined to descriptions and discussions of phenomena perceived by the respective principals. These were followed by organized staff visits between schools, with unanticipated outcomes.

The readiness of the three principals to accept and use implicit feedback on the perceived comparative effectiveness of their schools varied widely,

and it resulted in there being little prospect of any further consultant activity. Compounding the problem was the near-closure of one school due to demographic trends, a major senior staff problem in the second, and the known close friendship between two in the triad since early childhood. The third school utilized the staff-visit device a number of times to evaluate organizational and procedural options in schools with more similar philosophies.

The following implications were drawn:

*The low use made of the consultancy procedures negotiated at the beginning of the pilot, implies the methods used were, for this triad, ineffective. A collaborative device could have been useful to ensure consultant procedures were transposed from being putative notions into planned action.*

*Divergence between schools' (i.e. principals') philosophies needs to be thoroughly clarified, and accepted by consultants as a given situational factor during the entry phase. Any shift from a neutral non-evaluative stance by process consultants on philosophy, for example, limits their ability to give objective feedback on the range and nature of philosophies encountered in a school. If the staff later conclude that the divergence is a root cause of many difficulties in the school, then the process consultants could offer value clarification <u>processes</u>, but remain outside the <u>content</u> of deliberations.*

*There is a need during entry contracting for intra-triad awareness of personal readiness levels; in particular, willingness to accept open feedback of alternative perceptions and to the open self-disclosure of feelings. Judgement needs also to be made on consultants' willingness to accept situations and perceptions discovered as temporarily taken-for-granted, without deploying values.*

*Peer process consultancy is a useful mechanism to facilitate at subordinate levels when trying to encourage innovative commitment and self-renewal. It can be effective when used informally.*

The Second Triad reported that due to illness, one principal had withdrawn. The replacement principal had been given a hurried induction by his two peers. During this phase, the triad 're-discovered' the consultancy guidelines, and familiarization visits had clarified each principal's perceptions of local issues of concern. Much time had been devoted to clarification of philosophies, and the initial orientation toward 'problems' had been discarded as being too conceptually constricted. Decision-making processes and problem-solving procedures had become the theme of consultations. Visiting consultants were asked to appraise the planning, implementation and reviewing methods used by each client principal. There had been little contact with staff in each of the schools, but a number of procedural and organizational changes have stemmed from these reflective intra-triad discussions.

The implications drawn from this report follow:

*The intra-triad re-discovery of consultant guidelines produced, for this triad, a more 'custom-built version' of the earlier procedure, with a closer matching of present needs, available skills and desired procedures.*

*The focusing on to one 'problem' or 'issue of concern' might satisfy early demands for overt action by consultants, but distracts attention from a school's more fundamental processes. To use a medical analogy, attention should focus on remediation and prevention, rather than on symptoms.*

*It is a very useful exercise for consultancy procedures to be reviewed by triads. A sharing between triads would extend the scope of consideration, as would the experiences of invited superintendents with acknowledged expertise in this area.*

*This triad had re-negotiated the earlier process consultancy procedures, to a more limited model of principal counselling.*

The Third Triad reported that the focus of interest in these three schools were different. Staff were told early during the familiarization visits that the purpose of such visits was to help the principals. However, the triad reported real and immediate incidental pay-offs during the diagnosis phases. Consultants used different techniques to gather staff opinions - surveys, separate interviews, small group discussions - and yet had two concerns about the data they collected. Firstly, had staff been entirely frank, and secondly, would each client principal be able to respond to raised expectations?

These three principals drew some tentative conclusions:

- it would have been easier to have a common issue, e.g. student welfare, for all three schools;
- the client principal needs to thoroughly prepare work schedules for visiting consultants to use the time available most effectively;
- there is a need for early clarity on 'the issue';
- the objectives of the visits need to be fully communicated to staff, to divorce fact-finding with a purpose, from snooping;
- the diagnosis of staff opinions has an immediate positive by-product of accelerated staff interest and desire to be involved in any subsequent changes;
- there is often a need for visitors to accept a neutral staff counsellor role; and
- there are limits to what two fellow principals can offer with respect to particular needs in a school, and that these need to be recognized in the early negotiations.

The implications drawn from this report were:

*This triad's tentative conclusions have added substantial support to the first two stages of the guidelines.*

*Given the opportunity to reflect on their experience as neophyte process consultants, principals can sustain and improve their service despite the distractions of associated tasks, e.g. staff and principal counselling.*

*Emphasised throughout, is the need for clarity; of values, of objectives, of communications, of visit taskings, of skills, of interests, etc. This implies that the induction process was partiallu ineffective, in these respects, for this triad.*

*The recurrent themes of concern (for practical outcomes, and the efficient use of client and consultant time) indicate a developing value being placed on the activities associated with this pilot, as consultant skill and understanding develops.*

The Fourth Triad reported a common focus of interest - self-paced learning - but very different staffs and levels-of-readiness for change. Additionally, school demographies and school architecture differed greatly. One of the schools had recently been given a new task of accepting students from other neighbouring high schools and to sustain a new, somewhat controversial programme. Therefore, this school's interest in this area was, to a degree, organizationally imposed, whereas in the other two schools, the high initial interest was voluntary.

The familiarization visit by principals indicated that one school had a group of staff actively interested in trying out new ideas in the classroom, and secondly, that the principals would not achieve much during visits by merely 'chewing the fat'. Their experience as consultants since that time led them to believe that:

- consultants need to visit classrooms and talk to students and teachers to get a real understanding of the school;
- visits had to be fully planned to avoid haphazard sampling and therefore, biased data collection;
- the reporting of findings is a crucial mechanism if staff are to effectively review the learning in the school;
- time spent clarifying the issue of concern is seldom wasted, and often leads to the suggestion of solutions;
- staff are dramatically heartened and enthused by visitors whose interest is in the teachers' area of initiative;

- staff respond very positively to informal classroom visits by invited Departmental personnel with recognized specialist expertise or knowledge;

- despite one school's staff (with the imposed programme) appearing still quite disinterested in making any initiatives, the triad had decided it was worth persisting with visits and gently enquiry;

- although time consuming, the interest and stimulus it gave to the principals themselves easily justified their efforts to date;

- staff can learn to accept full open feedback, but it must be handled skilfully and once achieved, it is much preferred and leads directly to real change in the classroom; and

- staff can learn the basic skills of action research to take greater control of their own learning and development as teachers.

The implications drawn from the report above follow:

*It would be useful if indicators of readiness in a school could be evaluated to help process consultants adjust their expectations.*

*A crucial determinant of consultant effectiveness is the degree of pre-visit planning between client and consultants.*

*Perceptions of what constitutes 'real' school life varies enormously, and as this range of views needs to be effectively relayed back to the staff by the process consultants, an effective process needs to be agreed upon between client and consultant principals.*

*Staff morale and commitment appear to be highly correlated to professional self-esteem and it follows that inter-personal positive reinforcement will be dramatically more effective than distant, impersonal, or negative forms of sanctioning.*

*The skills of giving and receiving feedback of one's professional performance are learnable, and soon come to be preferred.*

*The processes and skills being learnt as a by-product of this pilot are directly transferable to the classroom, and immediately useful to sustain an action research approach by a teacher and students to problem-solving.*

The Fifth Triad reported that as these principals' schools were up to an hour's drive apart, early decisions were taken to visit infrequently, to hold preparatory telephone conferences before visiting, and to make each visit to last a whole day. The focus of interest was the same in each school: the role of senior masters. But, first the principals found it necessary to thoroughly re-clarify their own roles as process consultants. Then, by sharing the task, they reviewed the literature on senior masters. Despite a considerable search, they discovered there was no clear distinction between personal skills development, and development for particular roles. The significant linkage between means and ends clouded any attempt to define competencies. However, from this search, and an initial set of interviews with senior staff, a role questionnaire was developed and refined with wider staff consultations. In each school they uncovered many differing perceptions of the role, and discussions with some staff moved into deeper, more personal needs areas. With the results of the survey imminent, they had foreseen three events. Firstly, extensive staff discussion of the outcomes, and secondly, the identification of common issues worthy of attention. Either intra or inter-school inservice occasions to allow for peer-based development, and planned team-building were predicted as longer term outcomes.

Reflecting on their efforts as process consultants, they noted some discovered advantages:

- given the distance and time factors, the close adherence to the negotiated procedures had proved crucial to success,
- joint interviewing, had, as a by-product, exposed the perceptions and pre-conceptions of consultants. Further, after the feedback, it helped develop the searching and probing interviewer skills of the consultants, and
- it appeared that readiness levels of the staff in the three schools to be interviewed and to commit themselves to preparing for change, were by comparison to other reported sites, uniformly quite high.

The following implications were drawn:

*Readiness of staff in these schools to accept process consultancy is strongly linked to the taken-for-granted school norms to do with inter-personal trust and levels of consultation between staff. They appear to be, in turn, linked to the leadership styles, and to the nature of external consultancy the staff experience.*

*Pre-visit planning by client and consultant principals (fortuitously encouraged by the distances involved) proved of high value.*

*The length of visits enhanced the depth and extent of analysis and understanding of each school.*

*The literature of an area can yield concepts, models, even questionnaires. However, it has to be transformed into a useful resource by local interpretation before the understanding will be incorporated into schools' action research. The local interpretative task needs to be collaborative, to gain maximum value from this form of resource.*

*The extensive collaborative process of designing and refining a questionnaire across three schools produced such a considerable change in understandings and attitudes, that the dissemination of anticipated findings could well have far less impact, and point to the collaborative process itself as the fulcrum device, not the results of the process.*

*School development consultants can anticipate enacting a staff counsellor role on occasions.*

*Staff enjoy the processes of clarification and decision-making in themselves, but especially when they feel it will be guided toward desirable change, i.e. there is a known overall developmental strategy being utilized by the school leader.*

*These principals feel they have closely followed the originally negotiated guidelines for process consultancy and are already indicating the successes directly attributable to those guidelines, i.e. the trial of these pilot guidelines has already justified the exercise.*

The two recurrent themes in all reports are the purposeful facilitation of school development, and about productive processes linking the intervening variables of staff, historical, external, and situational factors. The net impression was that participants were actively involved in influencing the development of their schools, and in enhancing their skills and understandings of school improvement. Despite design and procedural difficulties, most placed high value on personal involvement in the pilot study. Competencies and understanding to be addressed

at workshops were surveyed[12] using a forced-choice rating scale, and the categories explicit in the tables below:

| 1: Little Use | 2: Some Use | 3: Useful | 4: Very Useful |
|---|---|---|---|

**TABLE 1: GENERAL TRAINING NEEDS OF PARTICIPANTS**

| A. SELF-AWARENESS AND PERSONAL IMPACT AWARENESS | B. CONCEPTUAL ANALYTICAL AND RESEARCH SKILLS | C. CHANGE AND INFLUENCE SKILLS |
|---|---|---|
| the ability to sense school needs, and the ability to generate school and individual awareness of the need for change. | the ability to link scientific and school information; the ability to research and diagnose problems within a school; and the ability to evaluate with the client/ consultant the results of the change process. | the ability to stimulate a school to change; the facilitating and assisting a school to change; and following up, providing continuity of direction and support. |
| $\bar{x}$ = 3.29 S.D. = 0.90 | $\bar{x}$ = 3.00 S.D. = 0.85 | $\bar{x}$ = 3.86 S.D. = 0.35 |

**TABLE 2: TRAINING NEEDS TO DO WITH SELF-AWARENESS AND PERSONAL IMPACT AWARENESS**

A1. SELF-AWARENESS

Self-awareness refers to being aware of one's own set of values, beliefs, ideas, general emotional state, intellect and all those things that make up the total person, and to being aware of how these things interact within the individual as well as how they are stimulated from outside a person.

$\bar{x}$ = 2.86 S.D. = 0.83

A2. SELF-AWARENESS AND OTHERS

This skill area has to do with the impact an individual has on others and being aware of other person's reaction to you.

$\bar{x}$ = 3.07 S.D. = 0.80

A3. AWARENESS OF OTHERS, AND INTERPERSONAL AWARENESS

This set of skills has to do with the awareness of transactions and associated consequences growing out of interpersonal relationships.

$\bar{x}$ = 2.71 S.D. = 0.80

A4. PERSONALITY THEORY

Being knowledgeable about personality models and how personality theories can be useful in understanding human behaviour.

$\bar{x}$ = 2.50 S.D. = 0.91

A5. GROUP THEORY

Being knowledgeable of how groups of people work together and what group dynamics can contribute to school development processes.

$\bar{x}$ = 3.07 S.D. = 0.96

A6. ORGANIZATION THEORY

Being knowledgeable of how organization theory seeks to utilize various behavioural theories, and in particular, being familiar with those used to understand the nature of schools as organizations.

$\bar{x}$ = 2.64 S.D. = 0.81

**TABLE 3: TRAINING NEEDS TO DO WITH CONCEPTUAL ANALYTICAL AND RESEARCH SKILLS**

B1. THEORY BUILDING

The ability to theorize about what is happening in a school, to help make predictions.

$\bar{x}$ = 2.93 S.D. = 0.80

B2. THEORETICAL MAPPING

Assuming a knowledge of organizations, group and personality theories, theoretical mapping means an application to a school to describe its organization and action in terms of those known theories.

$\bar{x}$ = 2.50 S.D. = 0.73

B3. CONCEPT MODEL BUILDING

This is the ability to conceptualize and design mental as well as graphic models of what a school is like, and in particular, how the school can be conceptualized differently from what it is today.

$\bar{x}$ = 2.57 S.D. = 2.98

B4. SYSTEMS ANALYSIS AND ORGANIZATION DIAGNOSIS

The skill to analyse interaction between technical and social systems, and to be able to design methods and procedures for collecting information about a school.

$\bar{x}$ = 2.29 S.D. = 0.80

B5. DATA PROCESSING

The ability to assemble information to test hypotheses, and to provide valid and meaningful information about the school.

$\bar{x}$ = 2.43 S.D. = 0.98

B6. FEEDBACK AND PRESENTATION

The skills to do with approaches to giving information back to a school for development uses.

$\bar{x}$ = 3.14 S.D. = 0.91

**TABLE 4: TRAINING NEEDS TO DO WITH CHANGE AND INFLUENCE SKILLS**

C1. CHANGE STRATEGY DESIGN

This is the ability to design basic strategies for school change, not the actual interventions used such as project team building or inservice courses.

$\bar{x}$ = 3.43 S.D. = 0.6[illegible]

C2. INTERVENTION DESIGN

This is the sequence of activities a consultant would propose to help a school learn about itself, the impact of change, and the planning of change. A wide spectrum of experience-based exercises could be used, including structured meetings, inservice, planning events etc.

$\bar{x}$ = 3.79 S.D. = 0.41

C3. PERSUASION AND POWER SKILLS

These skills are to do with the use of power by a consultant, to give advice, or to influence desirable change.

$\bar{x}$ = 3.08 S.D. = 0.91

C4. FACILITATION AND PROCESS SKILLS

These skills are to do with helping a group be more effective, or a school improve its decision-making procedures.

$\bar{x}$ = 3.36 S.D. = 0.72

C5. INTERVENTION SKILLS

Awareness of the different styles a consultant can use to interact with a school, and his adaptability to school needs.

$\bar{x}$ = 2.93 S.D. = 0.80

C6. TEACHING AND EDUCATIVE SKILLS

These are to do with the consultants' ability to teach professional adults, cognitively and experientially.

$\bar{x}$ = 3.07 S.D. = 1.10

If medium demand is crudely classified as ± 1 S.D., and a normal distribution of ratings is assumed, then the seven very high (>2 S.D.) and high (>1 S.D.) demand skill areas were:

| | SKILL AREA | MEAN RATING | STANDARD DEVIATION |
|---|---|---|---|
| C2 | Intervention Design | 3.79 | 0.41 |
| C1 | Change Strategy Design | 3.43 | 0.62 |
| C4 | Facilitation and Process Skills | 3.36 | 0.72 |
| C3 | Persuasion and Power Skills | 3.08 | 0.92 |
| C6 | Teaching and Educative Skills | 3.07 | 1.10 |
| A2 | Self-Awareness and Others | 3.07 | 0.80 |
| A5 | Group Theory | 3.07 | 0.96 |

However, such is the fall-off in consensus after the third item, it suggests skill workshops not venture outside this bound without negotiation.

In August 1981 the writer accepted his present appointment. An Interim Report[13] was distributed to clarify the emerging nature of the pilot, and to suggest the need for continued support, and replacement coordination. The process failed. Three important questions remain; is the 'being a peer process consultant' accurately represented above, what has happened to the pilot study, the schools and the participants since, and how do participants reflect on peer process consultancy as inservice for principals? Participants were asked to review the Interim Report in June 1982, and their responses are woven into the discussion below. All triads but the first were represented in the six, often lengthy replies.

DISCUSSION

The Interim Report - substantially incorporated above - is regarded as accurate without dissent. Since June 1981 the project has been at a standstill, although the fifth triad continued visits, others met informally events permitting. Reasons given include time and problem management, the need and desire to consult and the loss of facilitative leadership. A Departmental review of the pilot project was planned for July 1981, but it was overtaken by industrial trouble unrelated to the pilot. Principals were thus expected to remain in their own schools during the third term of 1981. But, in response to a recent letter, how do participants recall the experience of being involved in such a pilot?

The principals report a range of events, some attributable to the activities of the pilot. The fourth and fifth triads, concerned only with self-paced learning and the senior master role respectively, indicate a series of positive consequences. It was interesting that participants reflected on all consequences in very personal senses of involvement, knowing and caring: this implies that in the process of analyzing a professional situation to formulate feedback, the consultant could learn far more from the exercise than the client.

Formal facilitative coordination of such a pilot is held to be crucial by participants: they cite time, and the need for a neutral process consultant to act as a model and to maintain cooperative norms. Two principals, incidentally, argue that principals should be 'recycled' through acting-superintendencies for school (and principal) development purposes.

Problems with the pilot were recalled. The early flood of 'jargon' and articles caused apprehension in some, others felt the defining of guidelines was too cautious and exacting. The major difficulty repeatedly emphasized was the spasmodic and fragmented nature of principalship-as-it-is. It is clear such a form of INSET for principals has to be accorded value with a host of competing priorities principals currently perceive, but it also indicated that principals are prepared to shift priorities over time. Many other problems in particular triads are explicit above, and together are offered to assist future efforts.

CONCLUDING NOTE

On reflection, great merit is given by participants to the concept of peer process consultancy as inservice for principals. They cite six major outcomes: developed appreciation of consultative processes and techniques, positive changes in their schools, new personal enthusiasm and confidence, fresh willingness to search for root causes of attitudes and beliefs impeding development, an accelerated exposure to others' thoughts on school renewal, and learning a manner of helping each other that went past prying or evaluating in professionally improper ways.

The strategy appears to allow a principal time to parenthetically reconsider (with a peer consultant) his values with regard to a real administrative situation. Not only must he reclarify what he holds to be of value, he must also construct a vision of an alternative situation, and then conduct a strategic and tactical appraisal of change facilitation, before offering feedback and later services. This internal action research cycle could be a key mechanism worth attention: it appears from this pilot that it provides for the self-paced development of professional values, understandings and skills.

But how does this key mechanism relate to practice or human agency? Giddens'[14] helpfully defines social structure as rules and resources organized as properties of social systems, and by 'system' he means reproduced relations between actors or collectivities organized as regular social practices. Hence 'structuration' is defined as the conditions governing the continuity or transformation of structures, and therefore the reproduction of systems. Now if structure exists only as structural properties, and they in term are both the medium and outcome of the practices that constitute those systems, then it is suggested that this key mechanism appears to raise for collective examination either assumptions underpinning routine aspects of agency, routine agency based on those assumptions, or skills that such agency presumes. The central import of Giddens' thinking is that peer process consultancy is an invitation to participants to recursively evaluate construct and legitimize their practice.

The internal action cycle can be likened to learning three levels of analysis proposed by Habermas;[15] hermeneutic, nomological and critical. What hermeneutic analysis means for a particpant is that he develops his way of understanding what a school or administrative situation is defined by many to be. At the nomological levels he discovers and portrays how influentials construe or create 'the problem', and how others came to define it as they do. At the critical level, it means for particpants that values are to be articulated contested and constructed to underpin proposals about administrative agency, arguably to encourage a more emancipatory service. Indeed, as INSET, although peer process consultancy is ostensibly about school improvement, it is in effect an intervention into the character and cultural arts of an administrator.

Notes and References

1. See Muller, R.C. (1973) "Professionalism Restated" in Administrators Bulletin, vol.4, no.5, pp.1-4.

2. In Australia, entrance into the teaching profession is dependent on specific qualifications. Administrative qualifications are considered an advantage, but not a prerequisite for promotion, from the classroom into educational administration.

3. McLaughlin, M.R. and Marsh, D. (1978). "Staff Development and School Change", Teachers College Record, vol.80, no.1, pp.69-94.

4. An Australian appreciation of the administrative environment in education is provided by Ogilvie, D. (1982) "Educational Administration: What, Whither and Whence?" in Unicorn, vol.8, no.1, February, p.38-43.

5. Joyce, B.R. and Showers, B. "Improving In-Service Training: The Messages of Research", Educational Leadership, February, 1980, pp.379-385.

6. Fullan, M., Miles, M.B., and Taylor, G. "Organizational Development in School: The State of the Art", Review of Educational Research, Spring, 1980, vol.50, no.1, pp.121-83.

7. See Mulford, W. (1982). "Consulting with Education Systems is about the Facilitation of Coordinated Effort", Chapter 10 in Gray, H.L. (1982) (editor) The Management of Educational Institutions: Theory Research and Consultancy, Falmer Press: Sussex. This chapter is a more extensive treatment related to the Australian experience.

8. Knefelkamp, L., Widick, C. and Parker, C.E. (editors) (1978). Applying New Developmental Findings. Jossey Bass Inc.: San Francisco, no.4.

9. Cameron, W.G. (1980). "The In-Service School Development Project", In-Service Education Branch, Division of Services, N.S.W. Department of Education. January, unpublished.

10. Macpherson, R.J.S. (1980). "Report on the N.S.W. In-Service School Development Project", Education Project, W.A. Services and Development, W.A. Department of Education. June, unpublished.

11. Schmuck, R.A. (1973) in "Consultation in Organization Development: A Report of a Research Program at the University of Oregon, USA", a paper incorporated in Course E321 of the Open University. He distinguishes between 'consultative assistance', 'content consultation' and 'process consultation'. Consultative assistance is sought when a particular need can be met by short-term expert analysis and advice. Content consultation might aim at educating professionals in content areas so they can perform more effectively - in-service typically attempts to raise understandings, feelings of ownership and committment, i.e. presumes adoption. Process consultation aims at improving the procedures used by professional to clarify values, and to set and reach their objectives, i.e. facilitates adaptation.

12. The instrument was developed from Varney, G.H., "Developing O.D. Competencies", Training and Development Journal, April, 1980, pp.30-35.

13. Macpherson, R.J.S. (1981). "The W.A. Process Consultancy Project: Interim Report of the Pilot". Teacher Development Branch, W.A. Department of Education. 19 June, unpublished.

14. Giddens, A. (1979). Central Problems in Social Theory, Macmillan: London. Chapter 2.

15. Habermas, J. (1976). Trans. by McCarthey, T., Legitimation Crisis, Heinemann: London.